



WORLD HEALTH DAY 2013

Control your blood pressure... Control your life

High blood PRESSURE and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY¹

Regular physical activity is one of the first treatments recommended to lower blood pressure and improve cardiovascular health, among both the general population and those people with hypertension.

What is the link between high blood pressure and physical activity?

Exercising on a regular basis has many health benefits and protects people against high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases. Studies show that by reducing systolic blood pressure by 5 mmHg, deaths from strokes can be reduced by 14% and deaths from coronary heart disease can be decreased by 9%². Regular exercise is key to preventing and treating hypertension.

What is the prevalence of physical inactivity in the Region?

Physical inactivity among the adult population constitutes a real problem in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Low levels of physical activity have a direct link with weight gain, which in turn increases the risk of raised blood pressure. In some countries of the Region, the prevalence of physical inactivity can reach 70% of the adult population.

1. Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles that uses energy. (WHO)
2. San Francisco burden of disease and injury study. Determinants of health, high blood pressure: what can be done? <http://www.healthysf.org/bdi/determinants/hypertension/prevention.html>

The situation among adolescents is not encouraging. Data on the combined risk factors of overweight and lack of physical activity show that adolescents do not exercise sufficiently.

What is the recommended amount of exercise?

Physical activity refers to any bodily movement which uses energy and is performed as part of daily activities, such as household chores, walking, certain work and leisure-time activities, games, sports or planned exercise.

For every age bracket, WHO recommends levels of physical activity for the prevention of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, stroke and hypertension.

Children and youth aged 5–17 years

- » Children should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity daily.
- » Amounts of physical activity greater than 60 minutes provide additional health benefits.
- » Most of the daily physical activity should be aerobic. Vigorous intensity activities should be incorporated, including those that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 times per week.

Adults aged 18–64 years

- » Adults should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week.
- » For additional health benefits, adults should increase their moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous intensity activity.
- » Muscle-strengthening activities should be carried out on 2 or more days a week.

Adults aged 65 years and older

- » Older adults should accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week.
- » Aerobic activity should be performed in sessions of around 10-minutes duration.
- » For additional health benefits, older adults should increase their moderate intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week.
- » Older adults with poor mobility should perform physical activity to enhance balance and prevent falls on 3 or more days per week.
- » Muscle-strengthening activities, involving major muscle groups, should be done on 2 or more days a week.